

With the proliferation of channels, companies need more content to stay in front of the customer, and branded templates provide a broader spectrum of roles and the ability to create content while remaining on brand.

From Chaos to Symmetry: How Branded Templates Help Scale On-Brand Content

November 2024

Written by: Alan Webber, Program Vice President, Digital Platforms

The Upheaval in the Modern Content Ecosystem

For any business, from the small mom-and-pop shops on Shopify to the largest enterprises, content is the lifeblood of a business. When done well, it communicates everything the customer and the market need to know about that business from what the company values are to the products offer to generating loyalty from customers. And because content plays such a critical role, it is also important that the content that goes out is on brand and effectively communicates with the customer.

Not all content has to be branded. Content about the general industry such as blogs or articles about general market and industry trends doesn't necessarily need to be branded. But content that promotes the company and its specific products does need to be clearly branded because it is a representation of the company and its values.

For example, in 2009, the Pepsi company decided to rebrand some of its products including Tropicana orange juice. Pepsi switched from the traditional and established brand of an orange with a straw sticking out of it to a plain white container with a large splash of orange across it. However, it quickly discovered that the new branding made the product look more generic and less differentiated to the consumer, and sales significantly fell. It is estimated that sales dropped by over 20% due to the new packaging and that over \$130 million in sales were lost.

AT A GLANCE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » There is an increasing proliferation of channels and surfaces that require content.
- » Creating content has moved beyond the creative, creating more content but also opening the possibility of going off brand.
- » The use of branded templates allows for the broader creation of content while providing guardrails to keep the content on brand.

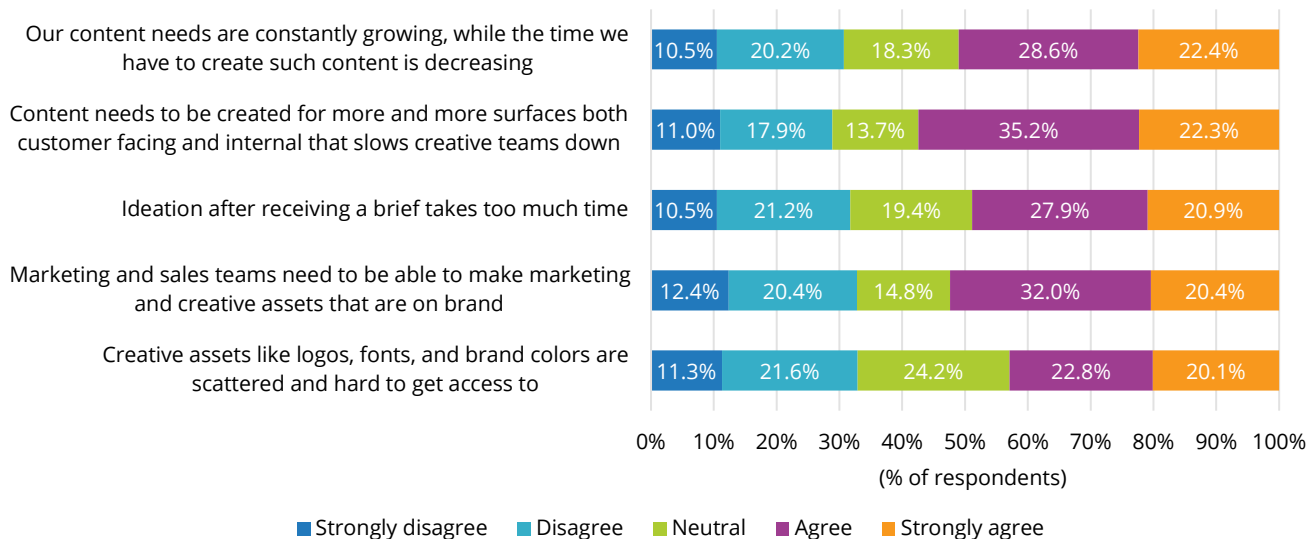
Customer trust and loyalty is often based upon the value that a brand carries. In a modern digital world, keeping consistent with a brand while remaining relevant to customers and an audience is difficult, and companies face a significant number of challenges trying to do it.

Maintaining Brand Consistency in an Ever-Changing World

What is clear is that content is no longer just the domain of marketing or a design department because of an explosion in content demand and a dramatic increase in the need to communicate visually. IDC conducted a survey of over 2,000 respondents looking at the needs and drivers around content and found that over 50% of respondents agreed that the demand for content was increasing, while the time the market was demanding to produce that same content was falling (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: *The Proliferation of Channels and Surfaces Is Driving the Demand for Content*

Q Please rate how much you agree/disagree with the following statements?



n = 2,011

Source: IDC's CCT Survey, July 2024

Part of what is driving this is the proliferation of places and surfaces for content. As people adopt different technologies and tools, the types of content that companies need to produce in order to reach them also needs to change. For example, that same survey found that over 57% of respondents felt that content needs to be created for more surfaces, and the proliferation of surfaces slows down creative teams as they make the same content for multiple surfaces.

And this drives the behavior content being created across the organization by a number of different roles for different purposes with the potential for a lot of variations. In our survey, 52% of respondents agreed that roles outside of the creative department like marketing and sales teams need to be able to make content that is on brand. That is the critical

piece of the modern content dilemma — democratization across the organization of content creation while keeping that content true to the brand.

Add to that the complexity challenge companies now face from the modern digital organizational structure. For example, how does one create a seven-figure Shopify business with only one or two employees? By outsourcing and contracting a significant portion of the work streams out, and those contractors still need to remain on brand. Even larger organizations that have remained traditional manufacturing businesses to finance and technology companies contract out a significant portion of their advertising design and content creation, and by employing external resources the company gives up a certain amount of control.

There have been changes also in the manner and by whom that content is consumed. Almost every consumer has a miniature computer with them in the form of a smartphone, and many of them are nearly constantly consuming content so much so that they tend to become numb or nonresponsive to general content and more responsive to personalized and targeted content. The challenge for companies is how to produce personalized content on a scale that supports the different customer bases and markets that they face.

Finally, more and more companies are becoming global, and having a global reach means adjusting content to the specifics of different countries and cultures. Some of the issues are language specific, but there are also cultural connotations with colors, symbols, and more. For example, the brand Nike was forced to recall thousands of products when it was discovered that a decoration that was intended to resemble fire on shoe actually resembled the Arabic word for Allah. And that is just one example of the complexities of being a global brand.

How to solve these challenges? One solution that organizations are adopting is brand templates. Templates are predesigned graphics and files that can be created for a specific brand look and feel. For example, the brand logo or PowerPoint slides in the brand colors and font are potential templates. These files and templates are available for use by almost anyone in the organization, but certain components of the templates are locked to adhere to a company's brand system. This allows brand guidelines to be enforced in an intuitive way while broadening the availability of content foundations.

On-Brand Content Simplified Through Branded Templates

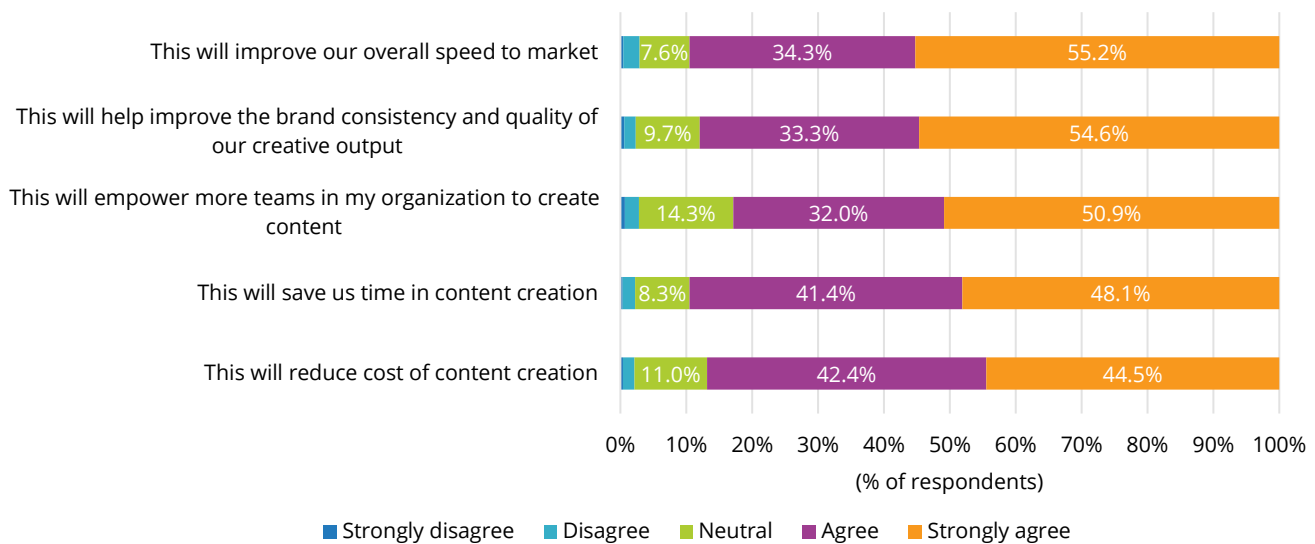
Maintaining a consistent look and feel across a brand's and team's content is a constant struggle (latest assets are hard to find, people forget to apply brand colors or fonts, etc.). Most brands have a set of brand guidelines that outline how to use brand assets and stay on brand. The modern problem that companies face is that while they have brand guidelines, enforcing those guidelines has become increasingly difficult due to the high velocity of content creation and, especially, updates to guidelines slip through the cracks. In our survey, 56% of respondents indicated that other teams outside of the creative and design teams are now producing content and that this shift has made it difficult to maintain brand consistency. That is why companies are switching to templates.

Branded templates are templates created by an organization's creative teams to help enforce brand guidelines with locked elements and brand controls. They allow for simplification and consistent brand voice and messaging of content creation including logos, color schemes, typography, and imagery. Our research found that 91% of respondents felt that having access to creative tools like templates empowers marketers to customize and produce on-brand content and are critical in allowing them to respond quickly to the market. When it came specifically to templates, almost 90% of the

respondents said that they would improve the speed to market, 88% said they would improve brand consistency, and 83% said they would empower teams across the organization to create content (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: **Access to Branded Templates Improves Efforts Across Content Creation Life Cycle**

Q Your creative team can create branded templates in Adobe Express that marketers in your organization can customize to produce customer-facing content that is consistent with your brand. This means that your creative professionals will not have to spend time assisting with simple edits like resizing images or changing copy. Based on your experience, what is your level of agreement with the following statements when having the above feature?



n = 2,011

Source: IDC's CCT Survey, July 2024

The end result is that when an organization appropriately and consistently uses branded content in templates, it improves the efficiency in the organization while improving content effectiveness that builds trust and loyalty with the customer.

Consider Adobe Express with Locked Templates: Democratization of the Creative Toolset

Adobe Express is a quick and easy create-everything application that focuses on non-designers like marketers that can be used interchangeably with the richer set of creative tools in Adobe Creative Cloud. Adobe Express empowers teams and businesses to create on-brand content through the use of locked templates. It tackles the challenges of enabling the democratized creation and modification of content by designers and non-designers alike while maintaining brand consistency and providing real business value.

The primary value behind Adobe Express is that it is an easy-to-use tool that allows non-designers to either create a variety of content (from flyers to presentations to social content) or make quick image and video edits. For smaller organizations and businesses, Adobe Express can be the only tool they need. And within larger organizations, Adobe Express fits the bill for non-designers to create content and quickly respond to shifts in the market. Another important aspect is the fact that Adobe Express connects non-design teams with creative teams that are the brand stewards in the organization. It is connected with the broader Adobe ecosystem through interoperability with Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, and Lightroom.

Add to that the value of locked templates in Adobe Express. Locked templates give companies an easy stepping-off point for the creation of new content based upon existing brand guidelines. Creative teams can create and share locked templates with non-designers and distributed teams. Creative teams can also package templates up in brand kits, so it's shared easily with other branded assets. This then gives non-designers on-brand assets that they can update themselves. There is also the ability to use commenting and co-live editing features that facilitate collaboration, feedback collection, and reviews between designers and non-designers to ensure designs stay on brand. Thus locked templates in Adobe Express enable designers and non-designers alike to remain on brand while reducing the cost of creation, and you have an extremely powerful creative toolset available for all to use.

With locked templates, Adobe Express allows content creation efforts to remain on brand while democratizing the creative process, no matter the creator.

Challenges

A number of factors can hinder the adoption of Adobe Express and its locked templates by organizations of all sizes. First is the perception that creative tools are too hard and complicated for a non-designer to use. Design professionals may use Adobe professional-level tools, but the non-designers are left without a toolset that they can use to make simple corrections or changes. That starts a chain reaction that results in all of the creative and design work being left to the design professionals, content creation being slowed down, and reducing the speed to respond to the market.

Another factor that may hinder the adoption of Adobe Express is the inclusion of generative AI (GenAI) tools and, specifically, Adobe Firefly. Adobe Firefly features like text to image, generative fill, and text effects are included in Adobe Express similar to other Adobe applications. Some companies are still worried about the source of AI-generated content. In our survey, 54% of respondents said they were not confident in using GenAI in content creation due to provenance and IP concerns. Adobe Firefly is designed to be safe for commercial use and, in addition, Adobe offers indemnification for Firefly-generated output through select plans for businesses, but some companies may not be aware of this. Even though Adobe has offered indemnification with the use of Adobe Firefly-generated content, companies may not be aware of that, or it simply may not be enough.

Conclusion

As channels continue to proliferate, there is going to only be more of a demand for branded content to stay connected with the customer, and that may be more of a demand than traditional creatives can fulfill. Technologies like GenAI will help fill some of this gap, but to remain relevant, other employees in the organization are

Having access to creative tools like templates empowers employees across companies to produce on-brand content and are critical in allowing them to respond quickly to the market.

going to have to step up to the content demands while remaining on brand. That is where solutions like Adobe's locked templates can support the creation of more content by more roles while providing the necessary guardrails to make sure that the content stays within brand guidelines.

About the Analyst



Alan Webber, Program Vice President, Digital Platforms

Alan Webber is program vice president for IDC's Customer Experience and Digital Platform research areas. In this role, Mr. Webber looks at the products and processes that companies employ to connect with and build better experiences for customers.

MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSOR

Adobe Creative Cloud for business with Firefly and Adobe Express solves your content production needs by bringing together best-in-class creative solutions on an integrated platform for all creative work. With groundbreaking generative AI capabilities, designed to be safe for commercial use, integrated into over 20 creative apps and powerful add-ons, Creative Cloud offers an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine creativity and stay competitive in this content-hungry market. Plus with Adobe Express, drive brand and design consistency across the business by creating locked templates for all your business' content needs, and enable the whole team to create. Every new idea, every project, every step of the workflow, covered.

Learn more at <https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/business.html>.



The content in this paper was adapted from existing IDC research published on www.idc.com.

IDC Research, Inc.
140 Kendrick Street
Building B
Needham, MA 02494, USA
T 508.872.8200
F 508.935.4015
Twitter @IDC
blogs.idc.com
www.idc.com

This publication was produced by IDC Custom Solutions. The opinion, analysis, and research results presented herein are drawn from more detailed research and analysis independently conducted and published by IDC, unless specific vendor sponsorship is noted. IDC Custom Solutions makes IDC content available in a wide range of formats for distribution by various companies. A license to distribute IDC content does not imply endorsement of or opinion about the licensee.

External Publication of IDC Information and Data — Any IDC information that is to be used in advertising, press releases, or promotional materials requires prior written approval from the appropriate IDC Vice President or Country Manager. A draft of the proposed document should accompany any such request. IDC reserves the right to deny approval of external usage for any reason.

Copyright 2024 IDC. Reproduction without written permission is completely forbidden.